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**AIRLAND BATTLE AND SOF:
A PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERIM DOCTRINE FOR
JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

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**A Monograph
by
Major Steve A. Fondacaro
Infantry**

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**School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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A Proposal for an Interim Doctrine for Joint Special Operations**

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ABSTRACT

AIRLAND BATTLE AND SOF: A PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERIM DOCTRINE FOR JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS, by Major Steve A. Fondacaro, USA, 51 pages.

(Special Operations Force)

→ This study offers the Army's AirLand Battle doctrine as an interim doctrine for SOF employment pending the development of approved doctrine of its own. The paper then briefly discusses the relation of SOF employment to AirLand Battle. The primary focus is on AirLand Battle's four tenets: agility, depth, initiative and synchronization. ~~In this discussion~~ the study establishes these tenets as the criteria for evaluation of selected historical examples, in the following section.

→ Three historical examples are selected for evaluation using an AirLand Battle evaluation framework. The Son Tay raid (Operation KINGPIN, 1970), the Iran Hostage Rescue (Operation RICE BOWL, 1980) and the Israeli raid on Entebbe Airport (Operation THUNDERBOLT, 1976). All operations are discussed in relation to their application of AirLand Battle's four tenets. The application or failure to apply these tenets are related to the success or failure of the operation, and set the stage for the concluding discussion.

The study concludes that AirLand Battle is directly applicable to joint special operations. The concluding discussion shows how special operations, though tactical operations by small forces, have strategic impact. The employment of SOF, therefore, is practice of the operational art by FM 100-5's own definition. This conclusion is supported by highlighting the strategic impact of all three historical examples, as a direct result of the application or failure to apply AirLand Battle's four tenets.

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INTRODUCTION

Military doctrine includes the preferred mode of a group of services, a single service, or a subservice for fighting wars. It reflects the judgements of professional military officers, and to a lesser, but important extent, civilian leaders, about what is and what is not militarily possible and necessary.

Barry R. Posen
1984

This study offers the Army's AirLand Battle Doctrine as a an interim joint doctrine for SOF pending development of an approved doctrine of its own. This proposal is made in the hope that the training of SOF in being and the course of equipment research and development will be proactively guided by a coherent joint doctrine instead of reacting to world events and technology. Only in this way, can SOF evolve logically to meet its present and future responsibilities while it develops its own unique operational doctrine.

This paper seeks to validate this proposal in a brief analysis of selected American and foreign special operations conducted over the last 20 years. In doing so, the four tenets of AirLand Battle doctrine--agility, initiative, deception and synchronization--should emerge as key doctrinal elements that apply to special operations and should assist in determining

how and why these operations succeeded or failed. U.S. special operations in Vietnam and Iran, and an Israeli operation will make up the historical examples studied. Prior to beginning any serious analysis of the specific operations, it is necessary to establish the current environment in which U.S. special operations are conducted. By doing so, the need for this study should become obvious.

In 1966, Congress passed laws that cut through the traditional inter-Service competition thought to be hindering the development of doctrine and established a coherent framework for planning and executing special operations. The result was the creation of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), a supporting unified command to which all SOF, regardless of service, are assigned. USSOCOM automatically became the next higher headquarters for each of the services' special operations headquarters: Army Special Operations Command (SOCOM), 23rd Air Force, and the Naval Special Warfare Command. The problems facing this new headquarters are many and varied, particularly in the area of developing doctrine. Three of the basic problems are:

1. There are few personnel, active duty or retired, who can honestly call themselves SOF experts, though many aspire to, especially within the United States. For the most part, those

individuals with the most recent experience have been parties to failures, and, as a result, have little credibility.

2. SOF is an area that lacks joint doctrine. Without a doctrinal basis, it is impossible to look analytically at history to determine clearly just what problems have existed in past U.S. attempts at special operations, and how to avoid them in the future.

3. Finally, and most fundamentally, special operations is an area in which it has proven most difficult for the military services and other government agencies to clearly define. This fundamental shortcoming hinders efforts by DOD to make measurable headway toward the creation of a viable SOF capability.

In 1981, the Reagan administration called for a significant revitalization effort in SOF. This has resulted in the creation of a unified headquarters, two additional special forces groups, a ranger regimental headquarters, an additional ranger battalion, and the initiation of numerous equipment and force upgrade programs. In light of this new emphasis, DOD is faced with the dilemma of having to expand forces and create a viable command, control, communications and intelligence (C³I) framework while at

the same time developing doctrine. DOD must somehow provide interim principles which can guide the actions of the forces in being. A readily available doctrine to fulfill this role is the U.S. Army's AirLand Battle Doctrine. While produced by and for the Army, AirLand Battle Doctrine is oriented toward warfighting not only at the tactical level, but also at the operational level at which, as the doctrinal name "AirLand" implies, war is a routinely joint function.²

As presented in the 1986 version of Army Field Manual 100-5, Operations, AirLand Battle Doctrine "explains how the Army forces plan and conduct campaigns, major operations, battles and engagements in conjunction with other services and allied forces."³ Additionally, AirLand Battle Doctrine specifically addresses special operations as actions "...with the purpose of providing timely and tailored responses throughout the spectrum of conflict."⁴ While the other services have not completely concurred in this doctrine, it provides a starting point from which USSOCOM can guide its force generation and training and equipment procurement programs. Meanwhile, the development of joint special operations doctrine can continue.

As new as the special operations area is, a part of understanding the critical importance of this developing

doctrine is its application to past history in an effort to understand how and why things went right or wrong. Barry Posen in the The Sources of Military Doctrine states that failure on the battlefield is a major cause of doctrinal innovation.⁵ This statement appears to be true if there exists an agency or service to take the lead in analyzing those lessons learned. The joint nature of U.S. special operations and the absence of a standing special operations headquarters explain why learning from failures has been so difficult for SOF. New doctrine must incorporate the lessons learned from past failure as well as success. Capitalizing on lessons learned from Middle Eastern warfare and the development of new concepts like the "extended battlefield", AirLand Battle Doctrine had "worldwide application" for Army forces when it first appeared in 1982.⁶

Inherent in this study, is the belief that AirLand Battle also applies to the conduct of special operations and fills a critical doctrinal void for U.S. SOF. The next section attempts to make this relationship clear prior to examining historical examples.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND AIRLAND BATTLE

An army's fundamental doctrine is the condensed expression of its approach to fighting campaigns, major operations, battles, and engagements...It must be definitive enough to guide operations, yet versatile enough to accommodate a wide range of worldwide situations.⁷

FM 100-5
1986

Essential to any discussion of special operations is a precise definition. The current DOD accepted definition of special operations in Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Publication 1, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms is as follows:

special operations--(DOD) Operations conducted by by specially trained, equipped, and organized DOD forces against strategic or tactical targets in pursuit of national military, political, economic, or psychological objectives. These operations may be conducted during periods of peace or hostilities. They may support conventional operations, or they may be prosecuted independently when the use of conventional forces is either inappropriate or infeasible.⁸

This definition fails to include the operational level of war in its discussion of special operations. FM 100-5 corrects this in its description:

influencing the accomplishment of strategic, operational, or tactical objectives through the conduct of low visibility, covert, or clandestine military actions.

In keeping with the USSOCOM mission of manning, equipping, training, and deploying SOF in support of the warfighting unified commands, SOF must be prepared to operate through all three levels of war. (See Figure 1) In support of theater commands, SOF can expect to provide the bulk of their service at the operational level. Further describing the use of SOF within the theater, FM 100-5 continues:

To execute special operations, forces are normally organized and employed in small formations capable of both supporting actions and independent operations, with the purpose of providing timely and tailored responses throughout the spectrum of conflict.¹⁰

The "spectrum of conflict" mentioned above is described in FM 100-20, Low Intensity Conflict and is a conceptual vision on warfare that relates intensity levels of combat to their current probability of occurrence. As described in the quotation above, SOF has the capability to operate throughout this spectrum. This capability of providing support throughout the spectrum of conflict highlights their operational flexibility. (See Figure 2) Special operations can occur under direct control of the National Command Authority (NCA) or under control of the applicable unified command. SOF enables the theater commander to exercise operational art using units whose capability is not determined in terms of size and fire-

LEVEL OF WAR	LEVEL OF COMMAND	ACTIVITY (TIME)	GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS
STRATEGIC	NATIONAL THEATER	WAR (MONTHS) CAMPAIGN (WEEKS)	GLOBAL MULTITHEATER THEATER
OPERATIONAL	ARMY GROUP FIELD ARMY CORPS	CAMPAIGNS (WEEKS) BATTLES (DAYS)	THEATER AREA OF OPERATIONS
TACTICAL	CORPS DIVISION & BELOW	BATTLES (DAYS) ENGAGEMENTS (HOURS)	AREA OF OPERATIONS

Figure 1. Levels of War¹¹

PROBABILITY OF CONFLICT		RISK OF CONFLICT	
LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT	MID INTENSITY CONFLICT	HIGH INTENSITY CONFLICT	
PEACEKEEPING SUBVERSION INSURGENCY COUNTERINSURGENCY	CONVENTIONAL WAR	TACTICAL NUCLEAR WAR	STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WAR
SPECIAL OPERATIONS			
TERRORISM--TERRORISM COUNTERACTION			

Figure 2. Spectrum of Conflict¹²

power, but more in terms of timing and placement. This is entirely within the definition of operational art as "involving fundamental decisions about when and where to fight..."¹³

Practicing operational art in accordance with doctrinal guidelines is how the theater commander plans and executes his campaigns and focuses toward his goal. Doctrine, in this case AirLand Battle, is the thread of continuity that ties the military force to the resultant end state. Within the environment of the active theater of operations (or theater of war), SOF employment fits well within the "extended battlefield" concept of AirLand Battle.¹⁴ The "extended battlefield" is merely a conceptual aid to focus attention to the doctrinal emphasis on attacking the enemy in depth. Depth is the first of four key tenets upon which AirLand Battle doctrine is based. Doctrinally, depth is defined as:

...the extension of operations in time, space and resources. Through the use of depth, a commander obtains the necessary space to maneuver effectively; the necessary time to plan, arrange, and execute operations; and the necessary resources to win.¹⁵

SOF is one of an array of options available to the theater commander with which to strike the enemy deep. By properly

tailoring the SOF and timing its use, the theater commander can arrange the employment of all of his forces in such a way that their effect upon the enemy is synergistic. AirLand Battle refers to this arrangement as synchronization.

Synchronization is the arrangement of battlefield activities in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at the decisive point. Synchronization is both a process and a result.¹⁶

SOF employment is particularly applicable to synchronization. By design and training, SOF does not conduct operations directly against organized heavy conventional forces. However, by achieving operational depth, their unique capabilities to strike the enemy throughout his rear area enable SOF to support the operational commander even though their activities remain separated from the main force operation in time and space. Through synchronization, the commander causes the combined consequences of these forces to be felt at the decisive time and place.¹⁷

It is critical that the operational commander maintains the capability to freely employ forces and maneuver. This observation presupposes that the operational commander is committed to keeping the enemy reactive and will not allow him to become proactive. This condition is created by

exercising initiative. Simply put, initiative "means setting or changing the terms of battle by action."¹⁸ Described another way, it is the conduct of rapid, yet coherent actions that cause the enemy to react so fast that his reactions gradually lose their coherence. In short, the enemy not only loses control of the battle to the operational commander, but only aggravates his predicament the harder he attempts to rectify it. Exercising this initiative requires a decentralized approach to command and control (C²) by the commander.

SOF is uniquely designed to operate in this fashion. Operating independently focusing upon the commander's overall concept and broad intent, SOF takes advantage of opportunities to keep the enemy constantly off balance and to achieve the desired end state. This ability to get "inside the enemy decision cycle" requires application of one final tenet--agility.¹⁹

Agility is simply "the ability of friendly forces to act faster than the enemy."²⁰ It is a necessary prerequisite to seizing and maintaining the initiative. In combat, overcoming the inertia of friction requires commanders to make rapid decisions based on the best information available and to execute quickly. Training and a clear operational concept make up for lack of information. Even though the enemy may have better information, if his opponent has acted before he

can use it, it may quickly become irrelevant as he falls farther behind in his decision cycle. SOF is uniquely agile in that it creates the impression of appearing at critical locations at the most unexpected times with intense effect. This condition is in total agreement with the battle conditions sought by AirLand Battle Doctrine. In describing its effect upon the enemy, FM 100-5 states:

From the enemy's point of view, these operations must be rapid, unpredictable, violent, and disorienting. The pace must be fast enough to prevent²¹ him from taking effective counteractions.

AirLand Battle Doctrine, when first presented in 1982, was designed to break the Army out its terrain and firepower oriented approach to war in Europe.²² AirLand Battle reoriented commanders' thinking from the defense (reactive) to the offense (proactive), utilizing force-oriented maneuver in depth on an extended battlefield. Conceptually, SOF is uniquely designed to complement this approach to war. AirLand Battle's four tenets (depth, synchronization, initiative, and agility) are the conceptual standards against which SOF training and operations can readily be evaluated. In this paper, the tenets will be used in a historical analysis of previous U.S. special operations to determine where in planning and/or execution either doctrine was not applied or simply fell short.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

We don't need to go back and look at things
that happened two years ago.

General David C. Jones
Chairman, JCS
1982

History is in many ways a mirror in which men see how they came to be where, who, and what they are. It is a gauge by which men can determine whether they are living life as correctly or efficiently as possible based upon an established set of goals. It even provides a means for evaluating the worth of these goals. This is as much true for the military art as it is for any other field of human endeavor, at least as long as war remains a phenomenon of human civilization. While history is not an infallible guide to the future, it is the only guide there is. To ignore it is to condemn yourself to the senseless repetition of costly mistakes. As Dr. Maurice Matloff, Chief Historian of the U.S. Army Center of Military History, stated:

Although study of the past cannot produce precise directions for the future or a capacity to prophesy, it can broaden human understanding and furnish a breadth of alternatives. Of course, even the broadest knowledge of history will not provide all the answers to all the problems of today and tomorrow, but study of the past is man's best path to surer understanding of

the present and to some surer guide to the future. It is perhaps clearest in telling him what not to do.²⁴

All too often, the lessons of history are too painful to be faced by some people, in particular the military. General Jones' remark quoted at the beginning of this section was in response to questions concerning a detailed study of the Iran Hostage Rescue and is indicative of this reaction. The essential point is that "we ignore our past and other people's past at our peril."²⁵ If this lesson is not learned by the nation's most senior leaders, then the deaths of the seven special operators in Iran were truly in vain.

In this section, three examples of special operations (2 U.S., 1 foreign) will be examined to determine why they were successful or failed. Using the four tenets of AirLand Battle Doctrine as the criteria for success, it should become clear, at least with these examples, whether AirLand Battle constitutes a useful doctrinal base for future special operations.

Operation KINGPIN (U.S.)
POW Rescue Attempt at Son Tay, NVN, 1970

The rescue attempt at Son Tay prison represents one of the first U.S. long-range special operations. Its stated objective was to penetrate into North Vietnam with a ground force and aircraft and rescue 45 U.S. prisoners of war

that high level U.S. intelligence sources had identified at Son Tay Prison, just west of Hanoi. No regularly organized force or headquarters task organized and trained for this type operation existed at the time. Rescue team leaders were selected, and they, in turn, selected all members of the rescue force. A command and control (C²) element had to be individually selected at all levels from the ground control element up to the overall control headquarters at the Pentagon.

The ground element leader, Colonel Arthur D. "Bull" Simons was allowed to build and train his teams with little or no interference. This was primarily due to the high credibility he had with higher level officials.²⁶ Additionally, Colonel Simons and his two subordinate team leaders, Major Elliot P. Sydnor and Captain Richard J. Meadows, were allowed to participate in the planning process from July, 1970, when the mission was authorized, to November, 1970 when the mission was executed.

Aided by a diversion created by elements of three Navy aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin, the ground element, flying in long-range Air Force helicopters originating in Thailand, would refuel mid-air over Laos and proceed to the target area in North Vietnam. (See Figure 3) Meadows' assault group, which would actually search for and handle the

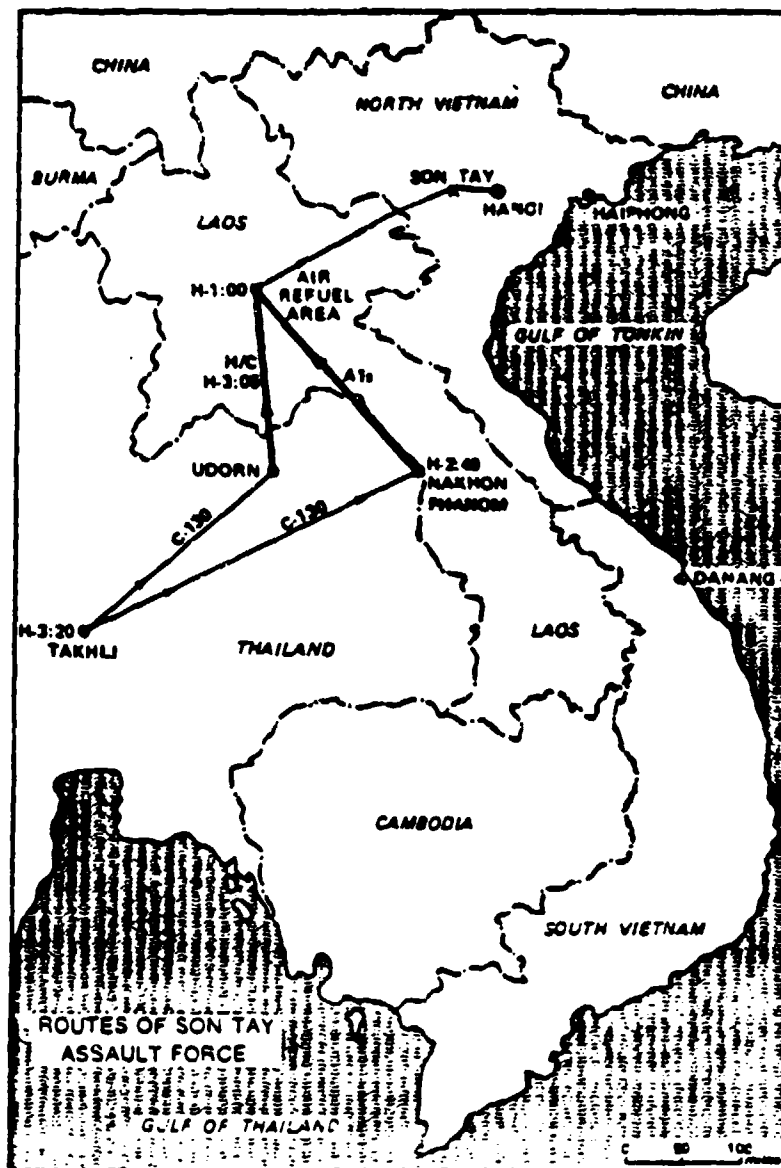


Figure 3. Air Routes of Insertion, Operation KINGPIN²⁷

prisoners, would crash land their helicopter directly inside the prison compound. Sydnor's command/security element would land just outside the south wall of the compound where they would blow an exit hole for Meadows' group to evacuate the prisoners. (See Figure 4) They would also provide internal security for the prisoners and the assault group. The support element, led by Simons, would provide external security for the operation. Once the prisoners and Meadows' group were cross-loaded with Simons' team on their helicopter, they would take off followed shortly by the remaining helicopters retracing their route into Laos and Thailand. The ground operation from touchdown to liftoff was to last about 30 minutes. Additionally, over 105 aircraft would be flown in a support, deception or jamming role.²⁸

On the night of 20 November, 1970 when the mission actually took place, the various phases of the operation went remarkably well. The unfortunate reality was that there were no American prisoners at Son Tay. Apparently, as later discerned by intelligence personnel, heavy flooding caused the North Vietnamese to move the prisoners weeks prior. Other mishaps that occurred during the mission were the downing of a F-105 Wild Weasel jammer aircraft and a lack of personnel accountability for a short time. The F-105s were included at

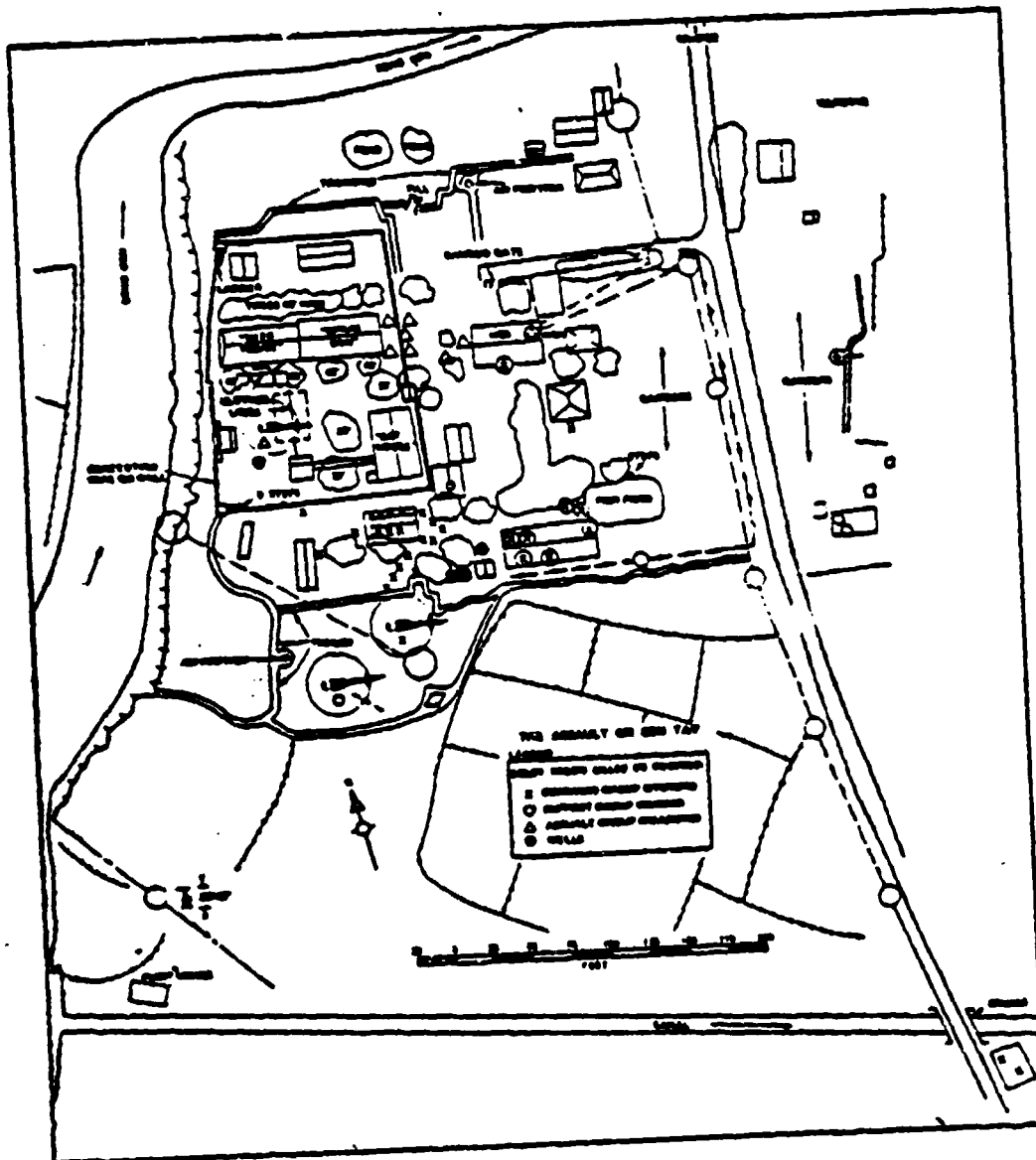


Figure 4. Planned Actions on the Objective, Son Tay Prison²⁹

the last minute by the overall operational commander, Air Force Brigadier General Leroy J. Manor to protect the raiding force and the F-4 Phantom aircap by jamming and attacking North Vietnamese radars and drawing off launched SA-2 missiles. The crew of the downed F-105 was safely rescued.

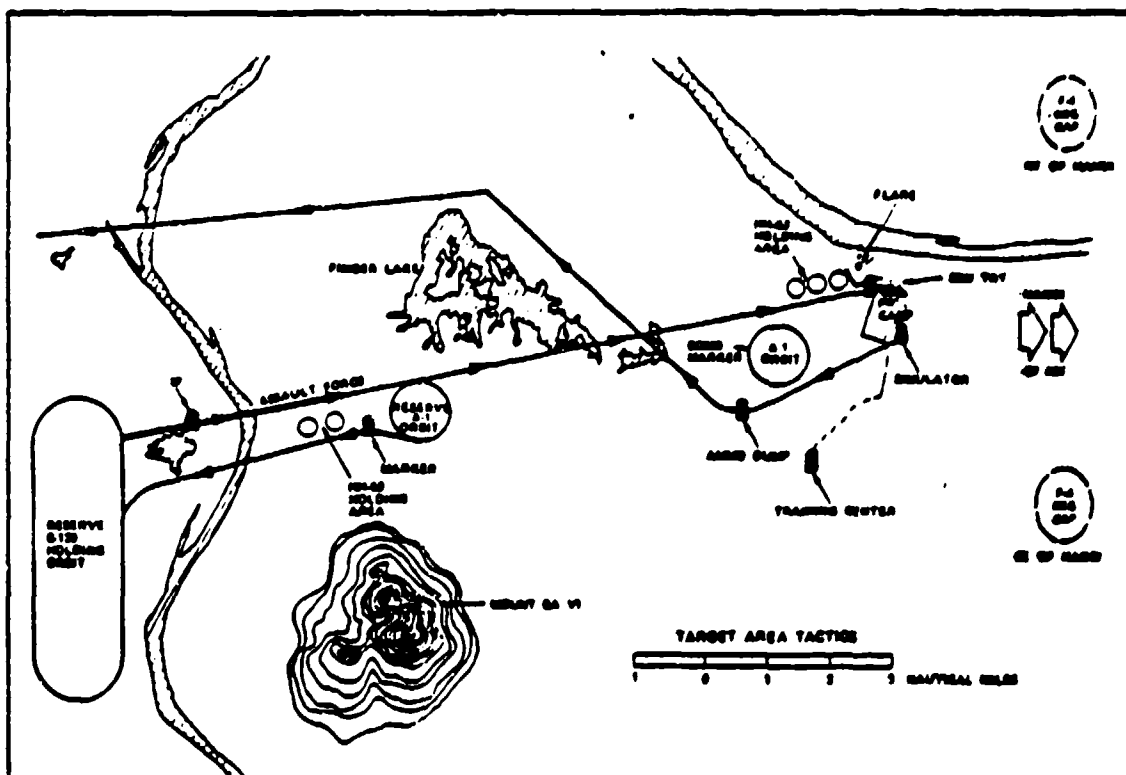
Personnel accountability was lost for a short period aboard the assault aircraft until it was discovered that one man had boarded a different aircraft than originally planned for. Both problems were resolved satisfactorily.³⁰

The daring plan, executed over thousands of miles, was a classic special operation. The indirect surprise assault deep in the enemy rear created the depth the small force needed to operate successfully against a superior enemy. The Son Tay raiders provided themselves sufficient time and a security window in which they could successfully conduct their mission. Tactically, this was achieved by the surprise created by the target selection and the undetected insertion. At the operational level, the diversion created by the air elements of three aircraft carriers over Hanoi diverted enemy attention in the opposite direction as the assault force conducted actions on the objective.³¹ The advantages created by this depth were exploited by the imagination, boldness, and foresight of the leaders on the ground.

The other battlefield activities synchronized with the mission were designed to provide security at the objective area. The flare-dropping aircraft over Hanoi, the F-4 Phantom aircaps, the F-105 Wild Weasels, the orbiting A-1 fighters, the C-130 tankers, and MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft all joined to make "their combined consequences felt at the decisive time and place."³² (See Figure 5) This created the synchronization the mission required to succeed.

Additionally, the effects of the SR-71 and other photo reconnaissance flights together with other intelligence activities combined decisively. However, these efforts failed to detect the movement of the prisoners prior to the mission. This was not a lack of synchronization. It was fog and friction that inevitably accompany all military operations. As was unfortunately all too clear, special operations are especially vulnerable to their effects.

Initiative was clearly seized from the beginning. The North Vietnamese never focused on what was actually occurring and were forced to react incoherently throughout the operation. The raiders set the terms of battle throughout the action. At the tactical level, this occurred during actions on the



objective at the Son Tay compound. At the operational level, this occurred over North Vietnam as the enemy was forced to react to a well orchestrated deception, i.e. a massive naval air attack over Hanoi. Even when Colonel Simons' helicopter initially set down at the wrong location, when numerous troops of "unknown" origin appeared from the nearby buildings, the raiders cut them down with no friendly losses, reboarded their aircraft and moved to the prison. The training and discipline of the troops and the cool leadership enabled the raiders to react proactively toward achieving the commander's intent throughout the mission in the face of unexpected developments.

Finally, the flexibility built into the plan, coupled with the extensive training of the troops and coolness of the leaders, provided the agility required to react to friction or enemy action. The initiative was never surrendered and raiders never lost focus on the mission. All elements rehearsed each other's mission thoroughly for total tactical redundancy. Three additional helicopters were on station to assume the mission if any or all of the primary aircraft were lost. Overwhelming supporting firepower was readily available for all contingencies. The raiders had the capability to respond effectively to any situation created by the enemy on the ground.³⁴

Doctrinally, Operation KINGPIN was a success. But unlike conventional operations, this special operation was by nature an extremely surgical operation. The more precision required in an operation, the more vulnerable it is to fog and friction. This makes the four doctrinal tenets all the more important to success. KINGPIN's mastery of them left the operation vulnerable only to the limitations of one of the most modern, state of the art intelligence systems in the world. In view of this, there is not much more anyone could ask of doctrine, systems, hardware or men.

Operation RICE BOWL (U.S.)
American Hostage Rescue Attempt, U.S. Embassy, Tehran, Iran 1980

Operation RICE BOWL was conceived almost immediately following the seizure of American hostages by militant Islamic students at the American Embassy in Tehran, Iran during November, 1979. Once again, as in KINGPIN, no joint special operations command and control headquarters existed. Existing forces from each service had not worked together. However, one anti-terrorist special operations unit had been formed by the Army in 1977. Specializing in surgically precise operations, Special Forces Operational Detachment-DELTA was certified combat ready on 4 November 1979, just as events were developing in Iran.

The Vietnam War had ended years previously and the skilled special operations personnel in all services fared badly in the force reductions that followed. As a result, in 1979 helicopter pilots like those who had flown to Son Tay, were scarce. There were few people with experience in forming and controlling a joint task force. Yet this is precisely what was organized on a completely ad hoc basis. Consisting of DELTA, rangers, Marine and Navy helicopter pilots and Air Force special operations airmen, Task Force 1-79 was formed under the leadership of Army Major General James B. Vaught and a selected joint staff.³⁵

In the six months that followed until the mission took place, these units trained extensively but strictly compartmented from each other. Partly because of the ad hoc nature of the task force, but mostly due to neglect by the senior leadership, the lines of responsibility during training and execution were blurred and confused.³⁶ As a result, the task force's ability to assess its capabilities was deficient. For example, the tremendous training tasks facing the helicopter aircrews could barely be addressed in the time available. The tasks these Marine and Navy pilots were used to performing were fifty to sixty mile resupply missions to and from ships off shore. The 500 to 600 mile low level overland flights were missions routinely conducted only by Air Force special operations pilots, of which there were 114 available at the time

of the mission. Since the larger Air Force HH-53 could not be lowered below deck aboard a carrier, Navy helicopters would have to be used. This apparently led to selection of Marine and Navy pilots. Pilots from different services who had never worked together had to develop within a few months skills on a par with those it had taken DELTA two years to develop.³⁷

The plan involved DELTA and ranger elements being transported from a forward staging base in Egypt into Iran by MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft to a preselected, obscure dry lake bed called Desert One. There they would secure the area and await link up with eight RH-53 Sea Stallion helicopters.³⁸ The helicopters would take off from an aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea and fly north over 600 miles at low level to Desert One. There they would refuel on the ground from C-130 refuel aircraft, load the DELTA force and fly to a location just outside Tehran called Desert Two.³⁹ Before first light, the helicopters and members of DELTA were to be hidden on the ground under camouflage netting until the following nightfall.

During darkness, the helicopters were to be uncovered, while the DELTA members were met by a contingent of pre-positioned agents with civilian vehicles under the control of retired Army Major Richard C. Meadows of Son Tay fame.⁴⁰

These vehicles were to drop the DELTA members at the critical locations from which they would initiate the assault upon the embassy. All the hostages were in two locations, the main embassy building and the chancellory. Once the hostages were assembled, the helicopters would be summoned from their hide positions. The pickup zone was a soccer stadium across the street where the hostages, raiders, and agents would load and fly to nearby Manzariyeh Airfield, east of Tehran. Prior to their arrival, a company of Army rangers, flying in from Egypt, would seize and secure the airfield, so MC-130 Combat Talon aircraft could stage to cross load all personnel including helicopter crews for the trip out of Iran (See Figure 6).⁴¹

By the time the units assembled for the mission, it was too late to fix the problems that had been created. When the forces were combined, additional problems would appear. The plan itself was designed with little or no margin for error, particularly with the aircraft. The aircraft would be operating at the outer limits of their capability, as would the crews. Hours of darkness in March and April were growing short and the time available would require almost flawless execution of tasks. As the operation developed, it was in just these areas that the planning would break down.



Figure 6. Air Routes of Insertion, Operation RICE BOWL⁴²

The movement of DELTA and the rangers to Desert One was uneventful except for civilians that were encountered and held where they could not interfere with operations. The eight helicopters that left the aircraft carrier Nimitz in the Arabian Sea started having problems two hours into the flight. One aircraft encountered a rotor blade failure that caused it to be abandoned in place. An hour later, the remaining seven aircraft encountered heavy dust storms that caused them to break formation and significantly reduce their airspeed. Then another helicopter's cooling system failed, causing the navigation and flight controls to become erratic. This aircraft immediately returned to the Nimitz. The remaining six aircraft, the minimum number considered necessary to conduct the mission, arrived at Desert One hours late.⁴³ One of the aircraft had a hydraulic system failure shortly before arrival. With only one back up system, it was unsafe to risk the mission.

It was at this point that Colonel Charles A. Beckwith, the DELTA commander, recommended the mission be aborted. Once this was approved, the helicopters were repositioned to receive fuel and return to the Nimitz so they could be used again. The dust created by the turning rotors reduced visibility to zero. As Aircraft #1 finished refueling and was

hovering to a staging location, the lack of visibility did not allow the pilot to detect that the aircraft was drifting into the C-130. As the rotor blades struck the fuselage, both aircraft ignited, killing seven crewmen. The resulting fireball caused the remaining men to panic, abandon the remaining helicopters, load onto the remaining C-130's and depart. The dead crewmen and classified material in one helicopter were left behind in the wake.⁴⁴

Like KINGPIN, the indirect approach of this special operation created the depth necessary for the different elements to perform their tasks. Undetected and deep within Iran, the troops certainly had created enough distance in time and space between themselves and their opponents. The groundwork performed in Tehran by Major Meadows certainly would have added to this if the operation had progressed to the embassy assault phase. The equipment failure, planning on the margin, and the lack of sufficient joint training is what combined to narrow this margin. These shortcomings severely reduced the time available and in the end, rendered the advantage of depth useless.

Though in many ways the amount of aircraft and activities planned for in support of RICE BOWL were no less, and probably more complicated than KINGPIN, most of them never

got the chance to be committed. Once again, equipment failure contributed toward a lack of synchronization. In general, prior planning and foresight set the conditions for synchronization to occur, especially in special operations. The combined effects of the ad hoc headquarters and planning arrangement, lack of interoperability, and compartmentalization all added up quickly on the critical day. The optimal arrangement of battlefield activities in time, space and purpose never had the chance to occur. This was critical for success.

Though by the very nature of the operation, initiative was initially gained, it deteriorated quickly as events began to fall out of synchronization. Instead of being proactive, the troops found themselves having to react to the effects of friction faster and faster, until these combined effects drove them beyond their capability in training, planning, and equipment.⁴⁵

The task force created a very narrow window in time and space to operate in, as well as a very small margin of error. The lack of alternatives to execute during the mission, left them deep in Iran when forced to abort. They had built in little or no agility. The "bug out" atmosphere at Desert One at the decision to abort, and especially after the collision, was reminiscent of Army units in Korea during operations

in which the odds were overwhelming.⁴⁶ The lack of sanitization and failure to destroy the remaining helicopters underscore this. The combined effects of the ad hoc C² arrangement precluded agility. This mission was barely feasible with almost no planned contingency actions.

Operation RICE BOWL is the source of much anguish and anxiety within the special operations community. Yet, this is a primary reason why it should be meticulously analyzed in order to understand why its margin of feasibility was too narrow for it to succeed without extraordinary luck. Analysis of the required tasks compared to the training level of the force should have indicated that the task force could not meet the required performance standard. Whether DELTA or the rangers were ready will not be known, but in any case it is irrelevant. All elements must be ready or none of them are in a special operation. This readiness window can be narrowed only by regular joint training under actual conditions evaluated by an experienced and cohesive C² framework. Clearly, the conditions were not set for effective application of AirLand Battle Doctrine's four tenets. In the final example, a successful operation against possibly greater odds will provide an example where the conditions for application were set with extraordinary results.

**Operation THUNDERBOLT/JONATHAN (Israel)
Israeli Airliner Passenger Rescue, Entebbe Airport, Uganda, 1976**

Operation THUNDERBOLT (later renamed JONATHAN after the slain rescue commander) electrified the world at a time when western governments had for years been besieged by an onslaught of terrorist hijackings, assassinations, bombings and kidnappings. Since the early seventies, the emergence of a "Terrorist International" among previously independent terrorist groups had put world governments on the defensive and anxious not to offend terrorist interests.⁴⁷

Israel, having a long history of not only combatting, but also of conducting terrorism was one nation that successfully fought these elements to a standstill. Surrounded by the most active terrorist elements in a loosely knit international terror network, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) adapted itself to the conduct of special operations, especially retaliatory strike operations. Prime examples were the destruction of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) headquarters in Beirut and Tunis, the hunt down and assassination of the architects of the 1972 Munich Massacre, and the kidnapping of a number of Syrian general officers to exchange for captured Israeli fliers.⁴⁸ Not much is known about how the IDF specifically task organized for these operations, but

careful examination of the information available in open sources reveals enough to conduct educated speculation. Importantly, there is not much doubt about the effectiveness of these organizations.

The setting for Operation THUNDERBOLT began at approximately 0800 GMT, 27 June 1976 in Athens, Greece. Air France Flight #139 with 263 passengers was seized by five armed terrorists, two Germans (one female) and three Arabs. The aircraft was directed to fly south into Africa where it landed at Entebbe Airport in Uganda. Over the next 24 hours, 48 non-Israeli passengers were released to the Ugandan government. The terrorists' next announcement came on 29 June demanding the release of 53 convicted terrorists being held in Israel, West Germany, Kenya, France and Switzerland. The Israeli intelligence agency, MOSSAD, quickly determined that the operation was under the control of Dr. Wadi Haddad, the second in command of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terrorist organization in cooperation with elements of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group in West Germany. It was also their assessment that Idi Amin, the Ugandan dictator, had somehow been persuaded to support the operation.⁴⁹

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin put the Special Air and Commando Service under Brigadier General Dan Shomrom on alert the evening of 27 June. They were to be prepared to meet the aircraft at Lod Airport in Israel, as well as to have forces prepared to deploy elsewhere.⁵⁰ With the aircraft down at Entebbe, this force was faced with an objective over 2,500 miles away, most of it over Russian-built antiaircraft networks in hostile Arab nations. The MOSSAD immediately set its agents to work and were shortly receiving on-the-spot visual updates of the terrorists' activities on the objective. Alerted unit members moved in civilian clothes to rehearsal areas so as to be inconspicuous on the Jewish Sabbath. With British assistance, secret negotiations with the Government of Kenya secured permission for use of Nairobi Airport as a stopover/refuel location if required.⁵¹

The planning team was at Special Air and Commando Service level. General Shomrom, Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Netanyahu (commander of the ground force) and a small staff had developed a plan that was ready for full rehearsal in five days. On Friday, 2 July, the task force conducted a full rehearsal that was ruled successful. The estimate was that up to 30 hostages would die. This figure was deemed acceptable by the Israeli Government.

After six additional Arab terrorists joined those already at Entebbe, the planned execution date was set for 4 July. There were now a total of ten terrorists at Entebbe. The plan itself called for four C-130 aircraft and one Boeing 707 C² aircraft to fly a low-level route of over 2,500 miles, initially west over the Mediterranean Sea, then to turn south and fly straight along the Suez Canal, then west through Kenya into Uganda. (See Figure 7) Three would be loaded with commandos and a hospital, and one would be a backup refuel aircraft. The first aircraft, with the primary commanders and the terrorist assault force, would land and park in front of the Entebbe old terminal building which housed the hostages and terrorists. A second aircraft, with the hospital, would land and unload a Mercedes automobile painted to look exactly like that of Idi Amin's. It would move to the main airport gate, neutralize any resistance, and establish a blocking position. A third aircraft would land with a primary mission to destroy the MIG fighters parked in front of the new terminal building, as well as the control tower. The fourth aircraft was fitted with a special pump to refuel the other aircraft from fuel tanks present at Entebbe. (See Figure 8)⁵²

Actions on the objective took place faster than scheduled and this pump was not used. The operation was planned so that

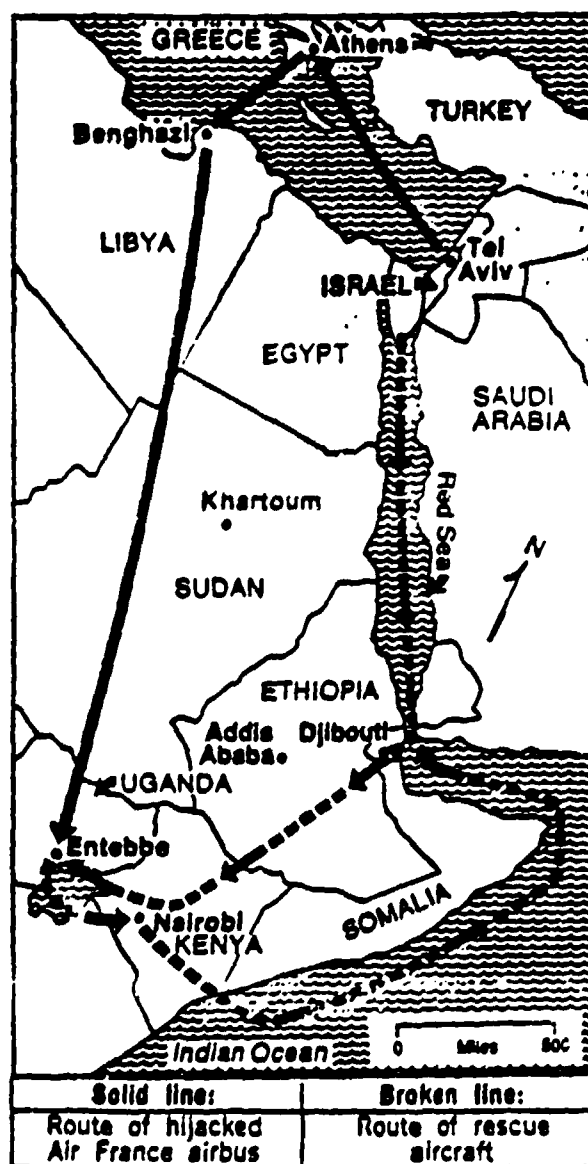
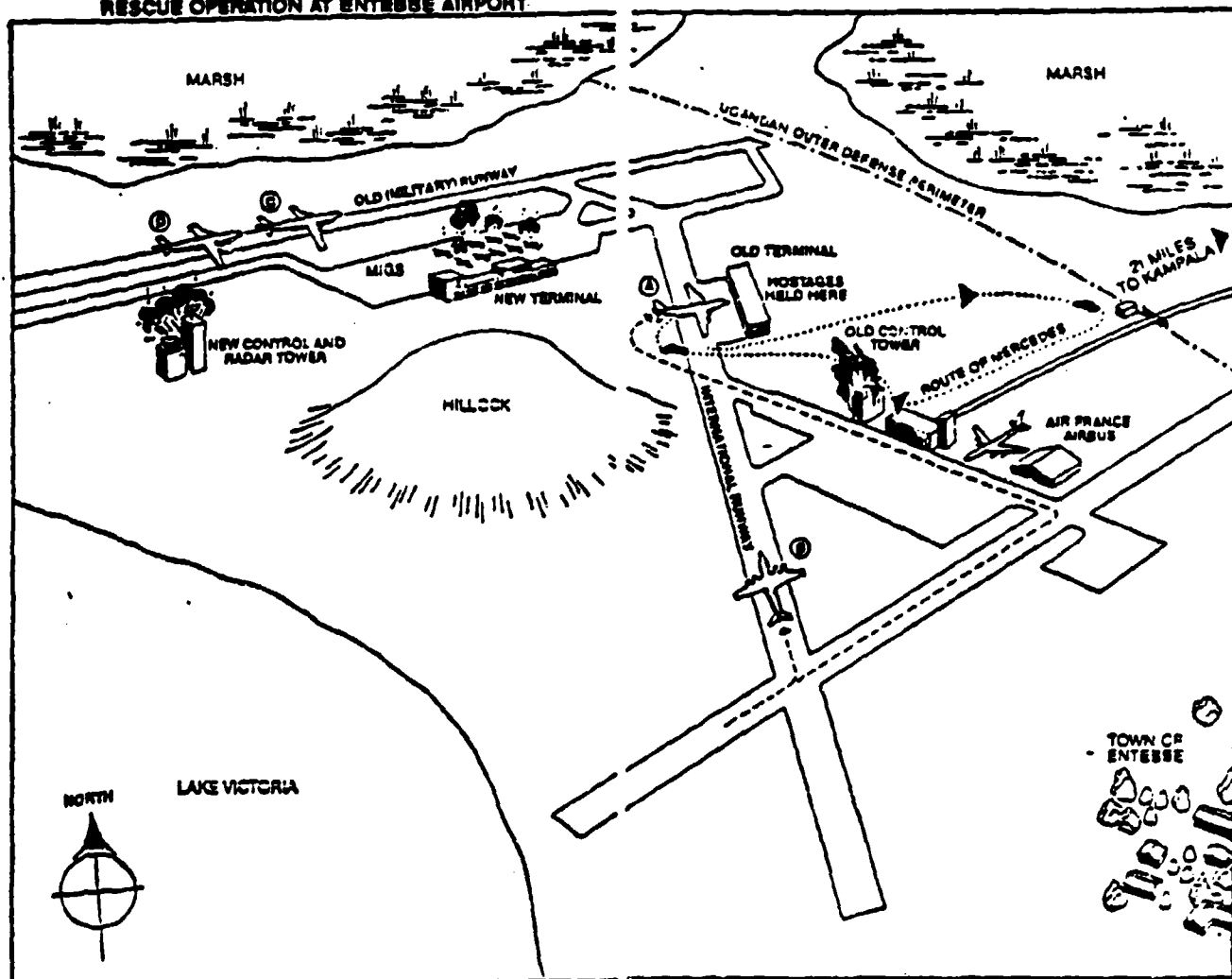


Figure 7. Route of Hijacked Aircraft, Insertion route of Rescue Mission, Operation THUNDERBOLT, 1976⁵³

RESCUE OPERATION AT ENTESSE AIRPORT



Arrival Sequence of Mercedes (at half-mile intervals)
 A: carrying Brigadier General Dan Shamron,
 the Mercedes, and
 commandos to overcome the terrorists.
 B: carrying commandos, equipment, and fuel tanks.
 C: carrying teams to
 destroy Migs and military equipment.
 D: carrying fuel, fuel pumps, and a small
 team of specialists.

Departure Sequence
 B with hostages, 13 minutes after landing.
 C and D with commandos and equipment.
 A with Brigadier General Dan Shamron.

Figure 8. Planned Actions on the Objective,
 Entebbe Airport, Operation THUNDERBOLT⁵⁴

the first aircraft with all the hostages would depart Entebbe no later than 55 minutes after the first plane landed.

In execution, the operation took place exactly as planned. The first plane with all hostages except one departed Entebbe exactly 53 minutes after the first touchdown. Two hostages were killed in the gunfire exchange and several wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Netanyahu was the sole military death when he was shot by a Ugandan guard while leading the assault. Seven of the ten terrorists were immediately killed, photographed and fingerprinted. Three others were captured and evacuated, although Israel has never confirmed nor denied this fact. Unknown to the rescuers, one hostage, who had been evacuated to a hospital in Kampala , was left behind and has never been heard of again.⁵⁵ All operations were monitored by the C² aircraft, flown directly over the objective area by General Benjamim Peled, chief of the Israeli Air Force. This aircraft was the primary long-range communications link to Israel.

Though the Arab sponsored hijacking caught Israel initially by surprise, the Israelis reacted quickly by reestablishing operational depth with the creation of a favorable time-space interval within which to effectively operate. This was accomplished through superior training,

c², and planning. Once arriving at Entebbe, the terrorists surrendered the initiative to Israel and ceased to act aggressively. As the government of Israel openly conducted negotiations with other nations and the Arab terrorists, they successfully projected an image of political weakness. The direct negotiations with President Idi Amin seemingly played directly into the terrorist planners' scheme. Amin, having deluded himself with images of winning the Nobel Peace Prize as the negotiator in the drama, enabled the terrorist planners to avoid dealing directly with Israel. The danger here was that they could plausibly deny any negotiated conditions and terms if they desired. By playing to Amin and outwardly portraying governmental indecision to the world, Israel set their enemy up psychologically for defeat and provided for themselves what little time there was to prepare the rescue.⁵⁶

Looking at the operation for elements of synchronization, a fundamental planning lesson becomes obvious--simple plans are easy to synchronize. The only operational efforts were those by the Israelis to mask their intent in the days prior as discussed above, and the activities of the MOSSAD. Tactically, the operation was performed by well-trained troops who were used to working together. This reduced the negative

effects of the many, diverse primary and supporting tasks special operations entail by nature.

After creating initial surprise that forced the Israeli government on the defensive, the terrorists surrendered the initiative to the Israelis who then retained it throughout the confrontation. This was accomplished with operational deception and speed and flawless tactical execution on the objective. The operational end state was achieved before the enemy operational leaders were informed a threat existed. It is important to remember the operational effect of the superb Israeli intelligence network. Though no open sources contain any details of their participation in the operation, it is known that the Israeli high command had access to real time details on Entebbe within hours of the aircraft's arrival and throughout the operation.⁵⁷ This is a critical element of successful special operations. Intelligence is what enables a small, covert force to maximize its operational effect at the critical time and place.

The fact that so many aspects of the plan were most likely deemed too improbable by their opponents enabled the IDF to display its superior agility at little or no cost. Risk was certainly high, but this is a common condition to

all special operations. Once initiated, the operation tactically paralyzed the enemy long enough for their neutralization, while operationally it totally surprised the enemy leaving him no coherent reaction. The ability of the Israeli government to successfully accomplish this mission within six days of the hijack is a tribute to the mental and psychological agility of the IDF. In comparison to other special operations, these mental qualities stand out as crucial to success.

CONCLUSIONS

A positive approach to national security strategy as an "offensive" policy tool can be applied to the concept of special operations...Special operations can be used to effectively preempt or to resolve political and military problems, but they are no substitute for effective foreign policy and decisionmaking.

Maurice Tugwell & David Charters
1984

This study has sought to validate a proposal for the adoption by DOD of the Army's AirLand Battle Doctrine for interim use by SOF. The validation has consisted of an application of AirLand Battle principles to special operations followed by the historical analysis of three selected special operations. This analysis has focused upon the presence or absence of AirLand Battle's four tenets--agility, initiative, depth and synchronization. This section will briefly compare results from this analysis and draw conclusions as to AirLand Battle's utility as a doctrinal guide for special operations. Finally, the study will close with a brief discussion of the doctrinal implications brought out by the comparison.

In comparing these operations, it is important to remember the key differences in the problems each objective presented to the operational planners. Of the three

operations, RICE BOWL created the most controversy. There are good reasons for this. First, RICE BOWL had a much more complicated objective. It required a covert insertion at an extended distance that required a full day layover, before conducting the rescue out of downtown Tehran. Second, there was a need to transition from fixed wing aircraft to helicopters and back again. Finally, Iran presented the most difficult intelligence gathering problem. What is equally important to remember is that RICE BOWL never developed past the insertion phase. This fact negates the impact of the other unique operational requirements of the mission.

The RICE BOWL task force prepared for six months. After six days the Israelis flew twice as far over territory just as hostile to rescue 104 hostages while suffering five deaths. While the operations may not be comparable due to different settings, the difference between unit capabilities certainly are. KINGPIN is an example of an operation involving multiple aircraft and a long range insertion into a state of the art air defense network, all of which had to be coordinated with a major air deception plan. Though intelligence failed to identify movement of the objective, KINGPIN is representative of a complex special operation superbly executed in an environment

that remarkably resembles that of RICE BOWL. In short, the resistance to comparison of special operations appears to be more visceral than logical once the facts are examined. What is important is understanding in doctrinal terms how and why these operations failed or succeeded. AirLand Battle's four tenets provide this thread of continuity.

Initiative appears to be characteristic in all the operations. The covert nature of special operations tends to create this condition, at least tactically. Operationally, the action must be designed to change or set the terms of battle. It must force the enemy to react or not allow him to react at all. All three operations characterized this condition. In KINGPIN and RICE BOWL, self-inflicted factors and friction overcame the operators as opposed to enemy action. In RICE BOWL, initiative was surrendered to events caused by lack of joint training, poor terrain intelligence, lack of flexibility and a number of other reasons.

Agility was a prominent characteristic of THUNDERBOLT and KINGPIN. It was conspicuously absent in RICE BOWL. The built in redundancy of KINGPIN's operators and aircraft and the speed of the THUNDERBOLT response exemplify the special operator's need to act not only faster than the enemy, but

faster than the effects of fog and friction. This was where RICE BOWL failed. The plan, the equipment and the personnel did not enable the RICE BOWL force to react to and neutralize the effects of fog and friction. Instead these effects built up to create conditions for the accident, after which the force could not react coherently.

Depth in terms of extending operations in space, time and resources was again characteristic of KINGPIN and THUNDERBOLT and lacking in RICE BOWL. The design and execution of KINGPIN and THUNDERBOLT enabled the operators to extend space in the long range insertion phase. Time was created in the deception plans inherent to both operations. Resources were applied to achieve a synergistic effect when considering the threat both forces faced. In RICE BOWL any depth in space, time and resources was lost due to fog and friction. Lack of agility precluded the operators from neutralizing these effects, until they determined they barely had enough depth to escape with their lives.

Finally, although all the tenets are critical to operational success in special operations, synchronization appears to be the most formidable in its effect upon execution. With the lower tolerance to friction that special

operations has, the synchronization of tasks and contingency tasks is essential. In THUNDERBOLT, all tasks came together in spectacular fashion, particularly the deception effort by the government, the activities of MOSSAD and the rehearsal and commitment of the assault force. In KINGPIN, all tasks seemed to work equally well with the exception of intelligence. Failure to synchronize this effort negated the effects of all other efforts. In RICE BOWL, synchronization appeared to break down almost immediately. The compartmentalization of the task force may have inhibited this process. Synchronization is necessarily based upon coordination, joint rehearsal of primary and contingency actions and clear understanding of commander's intent. All these items were distinctly lacking in the RICE BOWL task force.

Based upon the above discussion, diagramming the three operations and the four AirLand Battle tenets yields the following results:

	<u>Initiative</u>	<u>Agility</u>	<u>Depth</u>	<u>Synchronization</u>
KINGPIN	High	High	High	Moderate
RICE BOWL	High	Low	Moderate	Low
THUNDERBOLT	High	High	High	High

Though the four tenets of AirLand Battle Doctrine lend themselves readily to a comparison of selected special operations, the operational significance of AirLand Battle Doctrine to SOF employment may not be readily apparent. Special operations are essentially tactical engagements by relatively small forces at the objective site. What must be remembered is that these forces are always employed to have a significant impact on the achievement of strategic goals. This characteristic of "employing military forces to attain strategic goals" makes employment of SOF a classic example of operational art as defined in FM 100-5.⁵⁸

The rescue of U.S. prisoners of war from deep within North Vietnam was an objective of international impact in 1970. Operation KINGPIN, even though unsuccessful, was an daring attempt that created international controversy. Communist officials had difficulty making press releases without having to explain how U.S. forces penetrated undetected to the outskirts of Hanoi.⁵⁹ Investigations and arguments continued in Washington for months. Had it been successful, the solid corroboration of U.S. allegations of communist abuses of American POWs would have dealt the North Vietnamese a serious foreign policy blow. The U.S. bargaining position in Paris would have been significantly enhanced.

RICE BOWL was similar in its strategic orientation. It was designed to establish a U.S. capability to protect its citizens from terrorism. A successful rescue would also have spared the U.S. from having to negotiate on terms set by Iran and designed to undermine U.S. prestige. Its failure intensified thus U.S. loss of prestige and discredited a Presidential administration.⁶⁰

Finally, THUNDERBOLT was a classic reassertion of the Israeli strategy to never negotiate with terrorists. It further added to well established Israeli military prestige in its war against any Arab assault on its sovereignty. The success of the operation won for Israel worldwide admiration and further discredited its Arab enemies.⁶¹

Special operations, properly employed, have impact significantly out of proportion with their size and cost. In this way, employment of SOF is the most cost efficient means of practicing operational art available to the theater commander. This deduction would seemingly make the proposal of adopting AirLand Battle as an interim doctrinal approach to special operations worthy of more detailed consideration.

While this study is in no way an exhaustive study of special operations, it does, hopefully, accomplish two

things: It establishes a framework for future critical analysis of special operations guided by doctrinal criteria, and makes a case for the adoption of AirLand Battle as an interim doctrinal approach to the conduct of special operations. With the creation of a unified special operations command that has the responsibilities to train the joint special operations forces of the nation, guide the development of new forces and equipment, and manage its own program budget, lack of a coherent doctrine creates a situation where the command can only react to the problems present in each area. The result is an incoherent research and development effort driven by technology, not doctrine, and force development and training that is still driven by the parochial differences between service components. This study does not imply that AirLand Battle is the definitive answer. This study has merely pointed out the penalties of operating without any central doctrinal concept, and has proposed an interim solution. AirLand Battle Doctrine is joint oriented and forward looking, as well as proactive. This study has hopefully demonstrated the doctrine's applicability to special operations, and made a convincing case for it as guide to SOF development as opposed to the alternative of no doctrine at all.

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²⁶M. Hamlin Cannon. Leyte: The Return to the Philippines The U.S. Army in World War II, The War in the Pacific (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954) p. 55. Colonel Simons' was a well known special operations expert whose experience began a commander of B Company of the 6th Ranger Battalion whose POW rescue at Cabanatuan, Phillipines was legendary.

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